

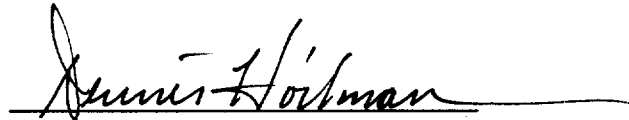
An Analysis of the Ways Shakespeare Implies Values in His Plays

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This discussion of Shakespeare's values as embodied by his characters seeks to refute Samuel Johnson's statement that Shakespeare makes no just distribution of good or evil and that he carries his persons indifferently through right or wrong, dismissing them without further care. This paper's premise is that Shakespeare does indeed justly distribute good and evil, and this is illustrated by whether or not his characters prosper. In order to examine this issue, this discussion includes a study of the main characters from a variety of Shakespeare's plays: one history--*The Second Part of Henry IV*; three comedies--*Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Merchant of Venice*; and two tragedies--*Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

An Analysis of the Ways Shakespeare Implies Values in His Plays

It can be said of great authors that they have the ability to create a world of their own. Accordingly, each generation may have such a person that it feels may embody the very spirit of its world . But what is unique about Shakespeare is his ability to capture personality types and certain situations transcends his generation and applies to each succeeding one. Thus, his works have stood the test of time. For while times and places may change, events and personality types remain the same throughout history. Shakespeare himself makes this point in *Julius Caesar* when he has Cassius predict that the assassination of Caesar is only the first of many such acts that will occur over and over in centuries to come:

How many ages hence

Shall this our lofty scene be acted over

In states unborn and accents yet unknown! (III-i, 113-15)

This passage implies a view of history as literal drama in which the plot (the historical events such as political assassinations) and the roles (conspirator, victim, opportunist, etc.) remain the same throughout time while the actors (the “real” people) and the theaters (the countries and the periods of history) change from performance to performance. Indeed, in the preface to the first Folio of Shakespeare’s plays, Ben Jonson recognizes that this grasp of the dramatic (i.e. drama-like) nature of history is at the heart of Shakespeare’s genius when Jonson states, “He was not of an age, but for all time!” (43). Later in this poem, Jonson states the very point I wish to illustrate:

Look how the father’s face

Lives in his issue; even so the race

Of Shakespeare’s mind and manners brightly shines

In his well-turned and true-filed lines,

In each of which he seems to shake a lance,

As brandished at the eyes of ignorance. (65-70)

That is, the essentially timeless values of Shakespeare himself are imparted to the audience through his plays. More specifically, as I intend to show, the characters who prosper in his plays embody the values of the man himself. Therefore, I disagree with Samuel Johnson when he says that Shakespeare

sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose. . . [his] precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. (Norton 2396)

By examining characters in each of these categories of plays--history, comedy, and tragedy--it can be seen that Shakespeare does indeed justly distribute good and evil through whether or not his characters prosper.

I. History

The Second Part of Henry the Fourth

Two scenes that effectively portray Shakespeare's values are the Gaultree Forest episode, and Prince Hal's rejection of Falstaff, which occurs at the end of the play. For instance, consider the forest episode. Each respective army is off in the distance, hidden among the trees while the rebels confer on a plain in the forest. Enter Prince John of Lancaster, who smoothly greets his cousin Mowbray as well as the archbishop. Both sides are ready for war--as they should be--and the viewers await the action. The apparent conflict is between the rebels and the king's forces, and even between Prince John and the archbishop. Yet the value that Shakespeare's

characters portray runs deeper than these apparent conflicts; he poses a moral issue of whether or not loyalty to one's word should supersede loyalty to one's country. At first glance, it may seem as if Prince John lies to the rebels and then further compounds his offense by drinking with them to seal a bargain that he has no intention of keeping. This poses the audience with the challenge of whether or not to respect a man--especially a prince--who gives his word to a man of God with the deliberate intention of breaking it.

By looking closer at Prince John's words, it becomes somewhat easier to reconcile oneself to this apparent conflict. For in response to Mowbray's inquiry about the articles, he states:

My lord, these griefs shall be with speed redressed,
Upon my soul they shall. If this may please you,
Discharge your powers unto their several counties,
As we will ours, and here between the armies
Let's drink together friendly and embrace,
That all their eyes may bear those tokens home
Of our restored love and amity. (IV-ii, 59-65)

So actually, Prince John does honor his words, for he drinks with them (the audience does not know whether or not he addresses their grievances), and there are people who witness it. It is the conditions of the peace that the Prince misleads the rebels about; in reality, he does not actually break his word.

Shift the focus for the moment from Prince John to the Archbishop. The Archbishop feels he has been driven to take up arms because, "I have in equal balance justly weigh'd / What wrongs our arms may do, what wrongs we suffer, / And find our griefs heavier than our offenses" (IV-i, 67-69). As a member of the audience, at first I accepted this justification of the bishop's right to bear arms. It was not until

Prince John's first speech that I again began to challenge the archbishop's assertion. It is in this very speech that Prince John brings to light the irony of the holder of one of the most high holy offices, "turning the word to sword and life to death" (IV-ii, 10). The archbishop is not only leading forces that represent chaos and disorder, but he is also going against his vows to God when he takes up arms against the King, whom the people believe rules in God's place. Thus, the viewers are forced to re-examine the archbishop's character, and of course, find it tainted.

Now the archbishop's reply, along with that of his men, is expected. For of course, in response to Prince John's scathing reprimand, the archbishop asserts that he is not there against the king's peace, but to ensure that their particular griefs are addressed (IV-ii, 30-42). Lulled by the smooth way the talk is proceeding, it is natural to feel disappointed when Prince John offers the peace and promises to see to the rebels' concerns. However, as soon as Westmerland arrests the rebels, it easy to fall into the common trap and castigate Prince John's act as dishonorable. But when Mowbray attacks with, "Is this proceeding just and honorable?" and Westmerland shoots back, "Is your assembly so?" (IV-ii, 110-11), members of the audience must again re-examine their original opinion of John's actions. It is at this point that the conflict, which is apparently over between the two sides, must be internalized by the viewers. Which is more important? Is it the personal honor of one's word (my first initial reaction) or is it loyalty to the state? Even more in Prince John's favor is the fact that in his father's absence, he is acting for the king, restoring order and in a way, taking his orders from God--as the archbishop should have been. If John had let the rebels go and answered their concerns as promised, he would have been giving the message to the people of England that rebellion was not only acceptable, but that it worked. And so we find that although peace is not, after all, agreed upon, it is nevertheless *established* by Prince John.

Shakespeare must have attached some value to honoring one's word as well as remaining loyal to the state. This is illustrated by the fact that Prince John's ability to remain true to his word and intentions wins the day for the king. Order is restored, and while his actions are questionable (intended to deceive), he definitely honors his word. Therefore, while Prince John acted craftily, he did it in order to protect and preserve the state, and one must admire the fact that he also did it with minimum loss of life. Thus, this is the reason Prince John's character survives and the rebels are put to death for treason.

Shakespeare further illustrates the fact that he respects the office of the king and the authority it represents in the last scene of the play. For it is in this scene that Hal, now King Henry V, banishes Falstaff from himself in both temporal and physical terms. When Falstaff attempts to address the king publicly, Hal, who now very much embodies all that being king entails, replies:

I know thee not, old man, fall to thy prayers.

How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!

I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,

So surfeit-swell'd, so old, and so profane;

But being awak'd, I do despise my dream. (V-v, 47-51)

He refuses to even acknowledge his association with Falstaff by depicting it as being the substance of his dreams; now that he has actually inherited the kingship, Henry V must recognize Falstaff no more. If he were to continue his relationship with Falstaff, it would not only undermine the integrity of his personal character, but also taint the authority and prestige that the kingship represents. Interestingly enough, Henry V also fulfills a promise that he made in *Part One*:

So when this loose behavior I throw off

And pay the debt I never promised,

By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes,
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil set it off.
I'll so offend, to make offense a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will. (I-ii, 208-217)

Hal's transformation is even more significant than Prince John's unblemished character. For like the prodigal son that returned home to his father, Hal also returned to properly claim the inheritance that his father has passed on to him. Hal has used Falstaff as a tutor, albeit an amusing one, to learn about the life of the people he will one day rule. His lesson learned, and his father's death making it necessary for him to return, Hal, now King Henry V, must completely banish what remains of his old way of life else he runs the risk of returning to his old ways.

Prince John voices his approval of his brother's decision, and in *King Henry V*, Shakespeare shows his approval of Hal's reformed character by ultimately allowing his kingdom to flourish, and his disapproval of Falstaff's all-consuming frivolity by having him die his natural death. Thus, by contrasting the continuously shallow character of Falstaff with the increasingly mature character of Prince Hal (King Henry V), it can be seen that while Shakespeare enjoyed revelry and good fun, he also felt it necessary to temper it with wisdom and good sense due to one's position. Without this balance, one lacks depth of character, and as illustrated by this trio of history plays, an effective monarch must have integrity, loyalty, strength of will, honor, and quick wit to govern his kingdom and ensure its successful future.

II. The Comedies

Twelfth Night, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Merchant of Venice*

The fact that Shakespeare portrays his values through his characters is illustrated in his comedies as well as his histories. Even though he enriches *The Merchant of Venice* with romance, romantic love does not dominate *The Merchant of Venice* to the degree that it dominates in *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. While *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado* both have underlying themes, Shakespeare vividly depicts the complexity of love through his two leading couples in each play. Furthermore, by comparing and contrasting how each person in the couple came to love one another, Shakespeare illustrates that he values a mature, wise love that is deep enough to acknowledge one's partner's faults and enduring enough to enable each person to love and accept the flawed partner.

Most of us are familiar with the common sayings about love: true love conquers all, love is blind, and love at first sight, to name but a few. Those of us who are romantics may even like to believe that these sayings are true. However, in both *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado*, Shakespeare brings insight as well as value to these sayings, and also makes the issue of so-called love at first sight (or love is blind or even love conquers all--as you will) more complex by creating two couples who completely differ from the other in make-up and direction. Through the development of Olivia and Sebastian and Viola and Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, and Hero and Claudio and Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado*, Shakespeare illustrates the fact that who each of these persons falls in love with is a reflection of their personality. This depiction of their personalities enables the audience to differentiate between the depths of love that each couple experiences.

In *Twelfth Night*, Olivia, consumed by grief for her dead brother, has withdrawn from society and suitors. Consequently, she is very difficult to gain access to, and has,

in fact, become like a prize to be won. Indeed, in the opening scene, the Duke likens himself to the "hart," and states, "O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first, / Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence! / That instant was I turn'd into a hart, / And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds, / E'er since pursue me" (I-i, 18-22). In order to declare the hunt a victory, he must win Olivia, and her hand in marriage will serve as the prize.

Olivia herself is somewhat cognizant of this fact. In response to Cesario's entreaties, she asks, "How does he [the Duke] love me?" Cesario's reply answers this directly when he states, "With adorations fertile tears, / With groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire" (I-v, 254-57). So, Orsino does not really love her person, he loves the *idea* that he himself has shaped of Olivia's character. Olivia recognizes this fact herself when she replies, "Your lord does know my mind, I cannot love him" (I-v, 257). At least Olivia indicates more depth of character than the Duke when she falls in love with someone she does get to know--Cesario. Indeed, upon what she perceives to be Cesario's fourth appearance (Sebastian's first), she bids him to go with her to her house and hear about all the pranks that her household members have played. It is at her house that she then entreats him to become betrothed to her. Since Cesario has taken the time to get to know Olivia and actually draw her out of her self-imposed melancholy, Olivia falls in love with "him." It is when Sebastian actually appears that she projects the love she feels for Cesario onto him, who is her twin in physical appearance as well as soul, thus making her feelings substantial. This match does indeed become substantial, for when Viola realizes that Olivia is actually falling for her, she thinks to herself, "If it be so, as 'tis, / Poor lady, she were better love a dream" (II-ii, 25-26). Which, of course, is exactly what happens when Sebastian enters the picture.

However, Sebastian's love must be dependent upon one of the adages--most likely, love at first sight. When Olivia mistakes him for Cesario and bids him come to her house, he thinks, "Or I am mad, or else this is a dream. / Let fancy still my sense in

Lethe steep; / If it be thus dream, still let me sleep!" (IV-i, 61-63). Olivia is the woman of his dreams, and despite the fact that he senses something is not quite right about the whole situation (IV-iii, 1-20), he throws caution to the wind when he agrees to marry this answer to his prayers. Although Olivia is apparently the stuff of his dreams, he does at least reply, "I'll follow this good man, and go with you, / And having sworn truth, ever will be true" (IV-iii, 32-33). At the very least, Sebastian swears to be true to his "dream lover." However, it is important to keep in mind that Sebastian represents Cesario in both appearance and soul, and in being so like-minded, would have encouraged Olivia the way Cesario did (albeit with different intentions related to their gender).

As stated earlier, Orsino considers himself in love with Olivia, and charges Cesario with the task of convincing Olivia of this so-called love. While he is in love with Olivia, or to be more apt, in love with the chase of winning Olivia (I-i, 17-22), he has genuine regard for the person of Cesario. Orsino's love of the chase is evidenced by the fact that he is still desirous of pleasing Olivia (and even by the great lengths he is willing to go to in order to win) when she clearly loves another. Still befuddled by the fact that Cesario has duped him, he answers her query about Cesario's fate by stating, "By your minion, whom I know you love, / And whom, by heaven I swear, I tender dearly, / Him will I tear out that cruel eye" (V-i, 125-27). Viola, haunted by her unrequited love of Orsino, replies that she would willingly die a thousand deaths would it give him peace (V-i, 132-33). It is when Orsino realizes that Cesario is in fact Viola, and as such, female, that he acknowledges his feelings for her character. Thus, when Orsino recognizes love for what it actually is, he is also forced to acknowledge that it is possible for a woman to feel as deeply as he does (II-iv, 90-125).

Viola's feelings about Orsino parallel that of her twin for Olivia. After her first meeting with Orsino she says aside to the audience, "Yet a barful strife! / Whoe'er I

woo, myself would be his wife" (I-iv, 41-42). She too has fallen in love with her dream man, the only difference is that the audience is privy to how her love for him could grow by this interaction. For throughout the play, Viola, by her very masquerade, observes Orsino with patience, understanding, and an ever-growing love. As David Jones notes, "This love of hers is probably the truest and deepest thing in the play because it knows that it can't expect any reward and it doesn't ask for any either" (155). It is obvious when she speaks to the Duke about her "sister's love" that she speaking about herself:

A blank, my lord; she never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud
Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sate like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
We men may say more than will; for still we prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love. (II-iv, 109-117)

And since Viola and Sebastian are so much alike, it is logical to infer from this parallel that Olivia's and Sebastian's relationship will develop accordingly.

Shakespeare himself realizes the limits of romantic love to solve all problems. While it may work in Illyria, he knows its limits in the everyday world; it is to make his audience aware of these limits that he ends the play with Feste's melancholy song that bridges the distance for the audience from the make-believe world of the theater to the reality of their own worlds. As can be seen from *Twelfth Night*, the discovery of true love is one of the major themes of Shakespearean comedy. Shakespeare takes his characters on a journey towards emotional maturity and a real discovery of relationships that deserve to be crowned with marriage. Thus, he values the process of

self-discovery that each person must complete before being united with their true love. Upon the completion of this journey, it is only natural to reward each person for his or her efforts by closing the play with the impending marriage.

In *Much Ado*, the journey that Hero and Claudio and Beatrice and Benedick must undertake differs from the journeys of the two couples in *Twelfth Night*. He presents his audience with two types of relationships: idealized love, as depicted by Hero and Claudio, and mature love, as depicted by Beatrice and Benedick. Although Shakespeare does not actually state that he values the quality of one of these relationships over the other, it is only logical to infer that he places greater value upon the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick when one explores the context and conditions in which each relationship develops.

For instance, in the very first scene of the play, when Beatrice is discussing Benedick with the messenger, we get the picture that something is not quite right. She's a little too interested in someone she finds lacking--for of their last encounter she speaks, "Four of his five wits went halting off, and now the whole man is govern'd with one" (I-i, 66-67). In this scene we are also given our first impression of Claudio--"the *right noble* Claudio" (I-i, 85), who happens to be one of Benedick's companions. And so our impression of Claudio continues along the same vein--a handsome young lord, just returned from the wars, besotted with the lady Hero. After asking Benedick about her, he counters with, "Can the world buy such a jewel?" (I-i, 181). Yet apparently, this is not his first sight of her. Consider Claudio's response to Don Pedro's question about liking her:

O, my lord,
When you went onward on this ended action,
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,
That lik'd, but had a rougher task in hand

Than to drive liking to the name of love.
 But now I am return'd, and that war-thoughts
 Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
 Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
 All prompting me how fair young Hero is,
 Saying I lik'd her ere I went to the wars. (I-i, 296-305)

Hesitant that his liking of her might seem too sudden, Claudio wants to elaborate more on the point, but D. Pedro puts him off by telling him that he has seen enough, and presently comes up with a plan to woo Hero for Claudio that very night (I-i, 316-28). So, Claudio has apparently seen Hero before he went to the wars, and was prevented from acting on his feelings for the very reason that he was off to the wars. Newly returned, he encounters Hero, and is again immediately besotted with her. After all, she meets his ideal--a fair, noble heiress who is not only rich but modest. Like Orsino, he is in love with *his* idea of Hero, for how could it be otherwise when he has never spoken with her but only laid eyes on her? It is this preoccupation with ideals that is responsible for his own downfall. For when he sees Hero with another man, he does not even bother to question her, let alone accept her "vice" and marry her nevertheless. He takes it one step further when he publicly denounces her: "Hero itself can blot out Hero's virtue. / What man was he talk'd with you yesternight/ / Out at your bedroom window betwixt twelve and one? / Now if you are a maid, answer to this" (IV-i, 82-85). He ignores her protests and in one swoop destroys her reputation with the following:

But fare thee well, most foul, most fair! Farewell,
 Thou pure impiety and impious purity!
 For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love,
 And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang,

To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm,
And never shall it be more gracious. (IV-i, 103-08)

So, his ideal version of her shattered, Claudio is able to quickly cast her aside and abandon her to her fate. When he finds out that he was wrong to have judged and condemned so quickly, he is able to make amends with Leonato by promising to marry one of his nieces. For perhaps this niece, being related to Hero, has the potential to live up to his ideal. However, presented with Hero at the end, Claudio receives her forgiveness, and his ideal is restored to him. Thus, Claudio has re-captured his ideal mate and has not had to accept any vices; Hero's so-called wrong is righted, and therefore the match is fixed. This is not so with Beatrice and Benedick.

Like Claudio and Hero, they too had met before. Unlike them, though, they actually had some type of interaction beyond just seeing each other. For Beatrice tells D. Pedro the following in response to his question about having lost Benedick's heart: "Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile, and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one. Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice, therefore your Grace may well say I have lost it" (II-i, 278-82). So, apparently, Beatrice and Benedick had loved before and something went wrong. Still in love with him, Beatrice attacks him so she does not have to defend herself; she is extremely wary of involvement with any man, let alone Benedick. Wary of involvement himself because of this previous entanglement with Beatrice, Benedick responds in kind to her sallies. Their verbal fencing is in fact a way to show they still are interested in the other. Through the "help" of their friends, they are able to cast aside their pride (albeit reluctantly) and accept one another again. However, unlike Hero and Claudio, their wrongs to each other have not been fixed, but accepted, and they love each other in spite of them. Thus, their love is not ethereal as is Hero's and Claudio's, but real in the fact that it has been allowed to mature, and thereby stands a better chance of enduring.

So, through the characters and relationships of Olivia and Sebastian, and Viola and Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, and Hero and Claudio, and Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare presents one with four distinctive ways each person came to love his/her mate: projection (Olivia and Sebastian), recognition (Viola and Orsino), captured ideal (Hero and Claudio), and finally, acceptance through acknowledgment (Beatrice and Benedick). Therefore, in these plays, each person has an ideal mate that complements his/her personality type. Is one type of loving relationship necessarily better than the other? Shakespeare himself addresses this question with sonnet 116:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediment; love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove.
 O no, it is an ever-fixed mark. . .

Quite simply, if one is in love, one must love the whole person--both the good and the bad. Anything less does not deserve to be labeled as love. Unfortunately, relationships do not always occur in this ideal state, but after all, in the words of Benedick, "The world must be peopled" (II-iii, 242). And so we see that while Shakespeare places greater value upon the wiser, more mature love of a couple like Beatrice and Benedick, he nevertheless realizes that it does not usually occur unless each person is capable of developing an unconditional love for their mate. Despite the fact that relationships such as theirs may be uncommon, Shakespeare is also aware that all types of relationships exist; consequently, if each person values his or her mate within the context of their particular relationship, then the relationship deserves to flourish.

Although Shakespeare includes several romantic couples in *The Merchant of*

Venice, their relationships are not the main focus the way they are in the previous plays. Accordingly, *The Merchant of Venice* does not end with the marriage of each couple, but their reconciliation. Since the focus of this play is different from the other two romantic comedies, Shakespeare again presents his audience with another set of values that deserve to be examined. Shakespeare highlights the values that he wishes the audience to focus on with the title of the play. Naming the play *The Merchant of Venice* calls attention to the very person Shakespeare wishes us to focus on--Antonio. While some may argue that Shylock deserves center spotlight in the play, this would completely imbalance the play.

Even though his dark character fascinates one, Shylock is by no means competition for Antonio when vying for the prime spotlight, that is, the title of the play. To have named the play *The Jew of Venice* would have taken the focus off the main character and put it upon an important secondary one. Shylock, though necessary to the play, is dependent on Antonio and not vice versa. While I agree with the comment, "The play is not centrally about the Jew, who anyway appears in only five scenes and not at all in Act V" (Dennis) I would take it a step further and argue that the Jew's main purpose is to provide contrast for Antonio's superior character. In other words, Shylock's role in the play is to serve as a foil for Antonio and the values that he embodies. The literal definition of foil is a "leaf" of bright metal place under a jewel to increase its brilliance (Holman 198), and this is precisely the manner in which Shylock serves Antonio. Thus, this is the reason that the play is named for Antonio and not Shylock.

To further examine the two opposing characters, it is necessary to take a close look at the setting, which is one of high romance and *not* modern realism. Although somewhat strange, the stories of the caskets, pound of flesh, the beautiful woman disguised as a wise judge, and even Jessica's development from Shylock's daughter

into a virtuous lady serve to create an enchanted atmosphere. Antonio is very much a product of this atmosphere and not the stodgy, somewhat intolerant businessman as he is sometimes perceived. The very risks Antonio takes are viewed in a poetic manner by his friends. In response to the question of melancholy that plagues Antonio from the outset of the play, Salerio replies:

Your mind is tossing on the ocean,
 There where your argosies with portly sail--
 Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood,
 Or as it were the pageants of the sea--
 Do overpeer the petty traffickers
 That cursy to them, do them reverence,
 As they fly by them with their woven wings. (I-i, 8-14)

Despite the fact that Antonio has much at stake on the high seas, it is not this which troubles him, a fact that astounds his friends. The truth is that Antonio himself does not know what it is that makes him so sad (I-i, 1). However, his ability to take great risks with little thought to himself establishes him as a romantic figure of old.

Not only is he a great merchant of the teeming city of Venice, but he is also a Christ-like figure in that he shares his wealth with all the needy and oppressed, much to the chagrin of Shylock and others of his profession. Antonio takes his role as savior of those less fortunate than himself so seriously that he even goes so far as to take Shylock to task publicly. It is here that the Elizabethan image of usurer must be taken into consideration. A usurer was one who mercilessly exploited his victims, a crafty loan shark who especially preyed upon the inexperienced and needy. Aware of the fact that Shylock was a usurer, the Elizabethans must have been hostile to him, and probably would have responded more positively to Antonio's (public) charges against Shylock than we would today. Indeed, while Christ himself preached the gospel of

love, even he denounced the oppressors and hypocrites in public and whipped the money changers out of the temple. When viewed in this manner, Antonio's actions are just, and even noble when compared to Shylock's offenses. It is logical to infer that Shakespeare valued such qualities as Antonio portrays (nobility, fairness, honor, and integrity) since he so clearly placed Antonio in a position which enables his audience not only to admire him but also to serve as an example for them to follow.

Yet his actions become questionable when Antonio goes to Shylock for a loan, which Antonio has previously boasted he has never charged nor paid interest on. While some may look at this as an example of Antonio's hypocrisy, I perceive it as an example of his concern to aid one of his friends who is in need. As a businessman himself, Antonio is more interested in results than theory, and is willing to sacrifice himself (like Christ) to produce results. In answer to Shylock's charges against him (I-iii, 105-125), Antonio, angered by the usurer's inhumanity to his victims, responds passionately that he will likely do all that Shylock has charged him with again. However, while Antonio's indignation is just and natural, Shylock's takes on a different tone. Antonio has publicly (and privately) insulted him, kicked him out of the Rialto, and spent his own money to rescue Shylock's victims. It can be seen that Antonio's actions are undertaken for the well-being of others, while Shylock's are undertaken for the well-being of only himself. Finally, when Shylock states his terms of the loan, the infamous pound of flesh, we begin to see him as he truly is--his own worst enemy, poisoned by greed and hate. His reaction to his daughter's betrayal, which is grief at the loss of his money and jewels--not his daughter, is another example of his lack of human concern and compassion. However, at no point is his villainous character more exemplified than at the trial.

First, despite the fact that everyone at the trial is appalled by his cruelty, it is the one scene where Shylock's dignity comes to the forefront. The frantic fierceness of his

two previous scenes (III-i and III-iii) is gone. Supremely confident in the justice of his case, he regards Gratiano's curses with amused indifference and shows respect to the Duke and Portia. Up until the reversal of his fortunes, he even goes so far as to treat Portia with admiration and (genuine) friendliness. Cold and calculating in his cruelty, Shylock is at his best in this scene as he becomes shrewd and persuasive when advocating his case. When the Duke appeals to him to show mercy, Shylock counterattacks with, "What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?" (IV-i, 89). Even when Portia takes over the trial and claims, after Shylock admits to having orchestrated the bond, that the Jew must be merciful (182), Shylock's response, "On what compulsion must I? Tell me that" (183) reveals how his moral code is bound to the law. What the law forbids, he will not do, and in so being bound to the law, he can neither give nor forgive unless the law itself would demand that of him. Again, Shakespeare illustrates that he values mercy and humility by placing Shylock in a position that shows his lack of these qualities to be ridiculous and even cruel.

In the very next speech, Portia explains that mercy must be an entirely free gift, one that blesses the giver and receiver alike. But when Shylock insists on the letter of the law, the sentence must be carried out on the merchant. It is when Portia speaks, "Tarry a little; there is something else. / This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood" (IV-i, 304-05) that the reversal of fortune occurs, and accordingly, Shylock is as beholden to the law as Antonio once was. All his wealth becomes forfeit, half to Antonio, half to the state, and his life lies at the mercy of the Duke.

While the Duke gives him his life, Antonio has the opportunity to show mercy, and the fact that Antonio does so, not thinking of himself even now, effectively makes Antonio's character shine all the more brightly while Shylock's is hopelessly dulled. Although some would argue that Antonio's second condition, that Shylock become a Christian, is neither just nor merciful, in light of Shylock's actions, it is both. As a result

of Shylock's strict adherence to the law, he is found guilty of plotting to take the life of a citizen, and if his victims had treated him the same way, he would be dead. When Antonio forces Shylock to convert to Christianity, he forces Shylock to give up his fanatical adherence to the law, and in doing so, Antonio, in essence, saves Shylock from his own fanatically cruel character.

Shakespeare awards Antonio's graceful show of mercy by ultimately granting his character success; for at the end of the play, his ships do indeed come in. Antonio's condemnation of Shylock's character is apparent in Shylock's downfall and destruction. It is significant to note that Shakespeare does not besmirch Antonio's character by tainting it with the desire for revenge against Shylock. By this admission, it is possible to conclude that not only does Shakespeare value humility and mercy, but he sets them as examples for his audience to behold. So, actually, the play *is* about "The Merchant of Venice"--*his* business dealings, *his* character, and *his* kindness. To call it "The Jew of Venice" would be to place the emphasis on Shylock's business dealings, character, and lack of mercy, which would completely thwart Shakespeare's message. Shylock's character and values (concern only for oneself, greediness, vengefulness, strict adherence to the law, and love of money) serve the purpose of calling attention to Antonio's noble character and values (nobility, fairness, integrity, concern for others, mercy, and humility), and in the interest of all concerned, *The Merchant of Venice* is the truly appropriate title since it places emphasis upon the superior character of Antonio.

III. The Tragedies

Hamlet and Macbeth

While the tragedies that will be analyzed (obviously) deal with more somber issues than any of the comedies that were studied, they nevertheless depict values

that Shakespeare represents through his characters. Ultimately, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare concerns himself with the just distribution of justice; in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare again illustrates he values justice and order. In both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, murder is used as the means to gain control of the state. And in both plays, justice is achieved at a high price. However, where Hamlet is tormented from the outset of the play by the actions of others, Macbeth's inner torment is a result of his own actions. Since each play takes a different route, it is necessary to examine each separately.

Just the name of Hamlet itself carries with it many different connotations. There is the image of a distraught young man, a vengeful son, a confused soul, a viciously cruel lover, and even an angry madman. And while his many moods tend to dominate the play, they also reflect the sense of impending doom that marks the play with the first appearance of the ghost in the shroud of fog. Despite the fact that Hamlet's powerful character dominates the play almost from the outset, his very actions are dependent upon, and even determined by, his relationships with others. The two most influencing factors are the relationships he has with his dead father, and next, that with his mother. These relationships, particularly that with his mother, determine how he treats Ophelia.

As is obvious from the beginning of the play, Hamlet truly mourns the loss of his father, the king. While the court celebrates the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude, Hamlet alone still wears the customary black mourning clothes. However, when the queen questions his continued somber disposition, Hamlet lets the audience know that *his* actions are not for show, as he feels the king's are (I-ii, 76-83). Hamlet still deeply feels the loss of his father, "But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (I-ii, 85-86). His father has been dead but two months, and to say that he resents the almost flippant attitude of the queen in so soon

forgetting him and remarrying is understatement.

Even though we, as the audience, never saw Hamlet's father acting as king, we know through bits and pieces of conversation about him that he was a good king; Hamlet respected him for this. For instance, when Horatio is about to tell Hamlet of the appearance of the ghost, he says, "I saw him [Hamlet's father] once, 'a was a goodly king." Hamlet's reply to this is, " 'A was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again" (I-ii, 186-88). In the soliloquy that precedes this conversation, Hamlet again refers to his father not only as an excellent king, but also as a caring and loving husband to his wife. Evidence of this fact comes later, in the scene where Hamlet is closeted with his mother. Just about to lose control and seriously wound his mother, Hamlet's father (as the ghost) makes an appearance, to remind him that he's not suppose to be taking out his revenge against his mother, but Claudius (III-iv, 110-14).

The audience can accurately interpret that Hamlet's feelings for his father ran deeper than just respect--he truly loved his father. We can see evidence for this not only by his continued grieving, but also when Hamlet is speaking with the soul of his dead father for the first time. When he finds out that his father was murdered, Hamlet responds with, "Haste me to know't, that I with wings as swift / As meditation, or the thoughts of love, / May sweep to my revenge" (I-v, 29-31). Here, overcome with emotion for his father, Hamlet hastily vows to carry through with that (Claudius's death) which the deceased king cannot. Thus, in the first act alone, Shakespeare has established that Hamlet truly respected and honored his father as king, as well as deeply loved his person. These emotions are what makes him feel committed to revenge.

Although Hamlet's true father is dead for the whole play, Hamlet's feelings for his mother remain undeniably intertwined with those for his father. The soliloquy that

first and foremost examines these feelings is Hamlet's first:

But two months dead, nay not so much, not two.

So excellent a king, that was to this

Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven

Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,

Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him

As if increase of appetite had grown

By what it fed on, and yet, within a month--

Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman! (I-ii, 138-46)

He then goes on to bemoan the fact that his mother, whom he loves deeply, married again so soon after his father's passing. If Hamlet did not love his mother, her seemingly callous behavior would cease to torment him the way it does. However, in Hamlet's eyes, Gertrude's failings are all the worse because she had the gall to marry Hamlet's uncle--an incestuous act in Elizabethan times. Gertrude has neglected to show loyalty to her deceased mate and also honor to his memory by marrying again so soon. This lack of feeling deeply concerns Hamlet, for his mother has illustrated that she no longer attaches importance to the values that Hamlet holds dear. It is logical to infer that Shakespeare also held these values (loyalty, honor, respect, integrity) dear else he would not have created a character (Hamlet) who is tormented by his mother's lack of them. At this point in the play, Hamlet feels that he must remain silent about her behavior, despite the fact that it is breaking his heart (I-ii, 159). It appears that the woman that he is closest to has completely lost all respect in his eyes, and he unfortunately projects Gertrude's betrayal of his father as being general to all women. This generalization, of course, is what in part destroys his relationship with Ophelia.

Again, when Hamlet realizes the depths to which his mother (albeit unknowingly) has sunk by marrying her husband's murderer, he is again forced to withhold action against her, this time at the bequest of his father:

But howsomever thou pursues this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her." (I-v, 84-88)

So the dead king's love for his wife continues to protect and cherish her from beyond as he looks to Hamlet to take no action against her when revenging his murder.

Nowhere is the torment that the conflict between Hamlet's love of his mother's person and hatred of her actions more evident than in the tempestuous closet scene. So incensed is he with her after the players' enactment of his father's murder confirms Claudius' guilt, that when Polonius summons him to her, he states:

O heart, lose not thy nature! let not even
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom,
Let me be cruel, not unnatural;
I will speak [daggers] to her, but use none.
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites--
How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never my soul consent!" (III-ii, 393-99)

His emotions turbulent from the moment he enters her closet, Hamlet sets out to finally rebuke the queen--forbidden from doing anything more drastic by his father, and even his own conscience. With a brilliant word play upon his entrance, Hamlet is able to deflect the queen's attack on him to the point that she herself is forced to retreat and man her defenses:

Queen: Hamlet, thou has thy father much offended.

Hamlet: Mother, you have my father much offended.

Queen: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

Hamlet: Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue

(tables now turned) Queen: Why, how now Hamlet? (III-iv, 8-13)

Hamlet successfully achieves his earlier mentioned purpose when he rages at his mother and allows his tongue the freedom to rip up at his mother and express his long, pent-up emotions much the way an enraged swordsman would give his rapier full vent when facing a detested enemy. Indeed, an appearance by his father's ghost is necessary to stop Hamlet's tirade before he reveals too much (his father's murderer to be exact). It is the ghost's gentle prodding, a symbol of his love from the grave, that serves as a reminder to Hamlet to let her be, and turns Hamlet's emotions from wrath against her to a combination of regret and remorse for the way things are currently. Emotionally spent, he urges his mother to repent of her ways, and sleep with Claudius no more (III-iv, 157-79). This emotional scene lets the audience view firsthand how much Hamlet still loves his mother, and it also lets us see the anguish Gertrude's betrayal has caused Hamlet.

Ophelia's curse in the play can be attributed to bad timing. Disillusioned with his mother's character, and thus generalizing her behavior as natural to women, Hamlet seeks to destroy Ophelia much the way his mother has destroyed him. With Hamlet, as far as women are concerned, it's betray or be betrayed. Ophelia has the misfortune to meet with Hamlet after he has finished speaking with his father's ghost. Deeply wounded by what he perceives as his mother's betrayal, Hamlet lets Ophelia bear the brunt of the anger he feels towards his mother but cannot express. His betrayal is only confirmed to the audience when we realize that their meeting is being observed, a fact of which Ophelia fails to inform him (III-i). He continues to treat her in

the same scathing manner until her funeral, where he finally admits that he did love her.

Thus, Hamlet's relationships with his mother, father, and Ophelia were filled with a love that was so all-consuming that his ties to each torment him throughout the duration of the play. However, it is worthy to note that his slowness to act upon his father's revenge disappears when he realizes that Claudius has also poisoned his mother. The knowledge that Claudius has murdered his father alone gives Hamlet the power to contemplate murdering him yet the knowledge that Claudius has also murdered his mother gives him the passion that finally enables him to act. Unfortunately for Ophelia, her death alone reveals to Hamlet that he truly loved her as well.

Therefore at the end of the play, justice is served to all. Hamlet is able to rid the kingdom of the evil that Claudius' ambition has set in motion, Laertes belatedly regrets his revenge on Hamlet but it is nevertheless accomplished, but most importantly, Hamlet is finally driven to act, and the knowledge that he has no longer torments him. By successfully doling out justice in this manner, Shakespeare illustrates more than the fact that he values it; he illustrates that it is necessary to effectively govern a kingdom. While *Macbeth* is also a study of evil at work in the world, it focuses on evil at work in the individual much more than *Hamlet* does. In effect, Shakespeare explores the chaos that results when a person who is in a position of power lacks nobility of character as well as the personal values of good judgment, loyalty to the state, integrity, honesty, and (again) justice. To simplify, he illustrates that the evil that eventually consumes Macbeth is powerful enough to destroy the good that does exist in society. What is so chilling about the play is the self-ambition that Macbeth acts upon is no stranger to any of us who are human. However, Macbeth's ambition eventually consumes him to the point that his conscience, which is present at the

beginning of the play, ceases to exist. Ambition that has grown to such proportions as his must be checked, and Shakespeare sees to it that "the time is free" (V-ix, 21) and justice is again (like time) able to operate only when Macbeth has been punished for his actions by his murder.

Not only does Shakespeare concern himself with what happens when the individual succumbs to temptation, but he also illustrates evil itself at work in the play through its settings. The play opens with thunder and lightning and the three witches. As the first act progresses, they cross Macbeth's path and present him with the temptation to commit murder. When Macbeth commits his first act, it is done under the cover of night, with only the creatures of the night providing background noise. For Lady Macbeth speaks, "I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry" (II-ii, 15). The only color that lightens the scene is red, and it happens to be the scarlet red of the murdered king's blood. Aware that this play is particularly dark, Shakespeare intertwines the setting with the plot. He uses the three witches (or weird sisters) to subject Macbeth to temptation. While it is not evil to undergo a such a temptation, it becomes evil when one succumbs to it. The Weird Sisters, who knew of his ambitions, could persuade Macbeth to evil, but they had no direct power over his free will. It is when Macbeth consciously decides to carry out the evil that his downfall begins.

The audience's first impression of Macbeth is that of a conquering general returned home to meet with his king. It is not until the three witches accost him that the viewers are forewarned of the evil that is to about to come. Interestingly enough, Macbeth himself is also briefly aware of the temptation that has just been revealed to him. For after Duncan names him the Thane of Cawdor, he confirms the fact that the sisters told him the truth, and also briefly considers the rest of their statements:

This supernatural soliciting

Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
 Against the use of nature? Present fears
 Are less than horrible imaginings:
 My thought, whose murder yet is fantastical,
 Shakes so my single state of may that function
 Is smother'd in surmise and nothing is
 But what is not. (I-iii, 130-142)

In this soliloquy, he realizes that he is tempted to do evil (murder for the crown) to ensure that the prophecy does indeed come true. Fortunately for him, he's only thinking this, and since he hasn't acted on it, his conscience allows him to rest.

Later in the play, when he ponders more deeply about whether or not to act on this temptation, he decides not to, as is evidenced by the last three lines of the If it were done soliloquy, "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself," (I-vii, 25-27). And when Lady Macbeth enters the scene, she provides him with the "prick" that he needs to commit the murder to gain the crown. And by the end of the scene, she has in fact persuaded Macbeth to do it, for he closes the scene with these words, "I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat. / Away, and mock the time with fairest show: / False face must hide what false heart doth know" (I-vii, 79-82). So, from the end of the first act, his inner turmoil changes from deciding whether or not to commit murder to whether, having committed murder, he can convince people otherwise and live with his own

conscience. He knows that once he commits himself to the act, he has passed beyond the shadow of what it is to be human, for he tells Lady Macbeth, "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (I-vii, 46-47). It is also the same with Lady Macbeth.

For before Macbeth's entrance, she pleads:

Come, you spirits
That tend o mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe topful
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and [it]! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
Wherever in you sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! (I-iv, 40-50)

By pleading with the spirits to take away her woman's compassion and enable her to do what acts she needs to gain the crown for her husband, she starts her own damnation. As husband and wife grow apart in their own torments, Lady Macbeth discovers what it truly means to have invited the "unsexing" that in short, amounts to demonic possession. The slight human compunction which makes her think twice before murdering Duncan grows into a curse upon her "unwomaned" body, and she finds that "a little water" does not clear her of this deed. It is this fact that drives her mad and compels her to take her own life.

Macbeth's downfall takes a different road. He has effectively "unmanned" himself when he committed to Duncan's murder (I-vii, 46-47). In effect, he has become

a slave to the supernatural. By mistaking the weird sisters' ill prophecy for good, he is now dependent upon it for his very life--his peace of mind has ceased to exist. This "unmanning" of himself is apparent in the passionless manner he accepts his wife's death, and also in his self-betrayal to fear and sleeplessness. He lacks the "season of all natures, sleep" (III-iv, 140). His remedy is to murder everyone who could possibly harm him. First, he murders Banquo, then Lady Macduff and her children. When he murders an unprotected woman and her children, it suddenly becomes apparent that his conscience, replaced by perpetual fear and guilt, ceases to exist. His chief care becomes to keep his deception a secret.

The suffering of the Macbeths may be perceived as caused by the pressure of order and justice slowly creeping in on them. This can be attributed to the work of time; Frank Kermode notes that evil, however great, ultimately burns itself out in Shakespeare, and time is the servant of providence (1310). While this can be seen in all of Shakespeare's plays, it is illustrated most clearly in *Macbeth*.

Thus, in the tragedies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses time as the great healer, and his evil characters are destroyed. Therefore, when Samuel Johnson remarks that Shakespeare carelessly distributes right and wrong and doesn't concern himself with what happens to his moral and immoral characters, I feel that Johnson himself is guilty of the carelessness that he charges Shakespeare with. By examining the main characters in *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, it can be proved that Shakespeare does indeed value moral questions of good and evil, right and wrong. And in the end, the characters that embody the values he most admires, such as honesty, integrity, loyalty, honor, concern for others, respect, and particularly justice, prosper, while the others meet their downfall.

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